



Delaware Early Childhood Council

Issue Brief

VOLUME 1, DECEMBER 2012

Kindergarten Readiness: An Overview of Components

Ready Families

Ready Communities

Ready Services

+ Ready Schools

Children Ready for School

Prepared by

Martha Buell, Ph.D., *Professor, University of Delaware Department of
Human Development and Family Studies;*

Rena Hallam, Ph.D., *Associate Professor, University of Delaware Department of
Human Development and Family Studies;*

Jason Hustedt, Ph.D., *Assistant Professor, University of Delaware
Department of Human Development & Family Studies;*

Jim Lesko, Ed.D., *Director, Delaware Department of Education Early Development and Learning Resources;*

Kelly Sherretz, *University of Delaware Institute for Public Administration*

The Council would like to thank the University of Delaware Department of Human Development & Family Studies and the Delaware Institute for Excellence in Early Childhood for their contributions to this brief.

For more information about this brief, contact **Dan Rich**, *Chair, Early Childhood Council* (drich@udel.edu).

The Delaware Early Childhood Council (ECC) is the State Advisory Council on Early Childhood for children from birth to eight years of age. The ECC is charged with carrying out all of the functions designated in the federal *Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007* and other functions as assigned by the Governor, General Assembly, and the Interagency Resource Management Committee. The ECC is comprised primarily of private sector members, but includes public sector members from the Departments of Health and Social Services, Services for Children, Youth and Their Families, and Education. There are nineteen members of the Council appointed by the Governor.

Delaware Early Childhood Council Issue Brief – Kindergarten Readiness: An Overview of the Components

The path to success in school and in life begins at birth. The skills a child learns in the first years of life will fundamentally shape the adult that the child will grow to be. While kindergarten readiness is sometimes discussed as an outcome, it is, in reality, a process. The process of preparing a child to be successful from the first day of kindergarten to the day he/she graduates from college begins in the first five years of the child's life. Investments ensuring that children are supported in the early years have demonstrated some of the highest rates of return of any public programs (Heckman, 2011).

In order to optimize learning and development, children need a variety of supports and opportunities from birth that address physical and emotional health as well as academic and social development. Families of very young children need access to a range of resources and supports in the community to assist them in ensuring that their children receive these opportunities. Early care and education providers play a critical role in supporting families to understand the developmental needs of very young children. Equally important are schools that are ready to support young children during their transition to kindergarten, recognize that children in pre-primary grades have learning needs very different from older children, and can work with families to ensure that all children succeed.

Kindergarten-Readiness Factors

Since kindergarten readiness is a multidimensional concept, it has been defined in a number of ways and has been a topic of national discussion. One organization contributing to the discussion is the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), which focuses on the needs of children from birth to age eight and offers professional standards for early-childhood programs (National Association for the Education of Young Children, n.d.). According to NAEYC (2009), "the commitment to promoting school readiness requires: (1) giving all children access to the opportunities that promote school success; (2) recognizing and supporting children's individual differences; and (3) establishing reasonable and appropriate expectations for what children should be able to do when they enter school."

There are many factors that contribute to kindergarten readiness. *The National School Readiness Indicators Initiative* (2005), created a framework with indicators that supports children's readiness for school and can be used to inform policy and track progress for children birth to age eight. It was used in Delaware's Early Childhood plan, *Early Success*.

Ready Families + Ready Communities + Ready Services + Ready Schools = Children Ready for School (Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, 2005)

Ready Children need to be supported across five developmental domains from infancy through preschool so they are ready for success when they enter kindergarten:

- 1) *Physical Development* includes factors such as a child's health, motor skills, and coordination. Comprehensive and developmental health services are necessary to produce healthy development. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) *Bright Futures* states that children need access to consistent wellness check-ups and a medical home (Bruner, 2011). Children also need access to healthy food and community resources that allow them to develop physical skills.
- 2) *Social and Emotional Development* include experiences that promote a sense of personal well-being from caring relationships and opportunities for developing good relationships with peers, caregivers, and teachers (Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, 2005). This area contributes to children's willingness to develop friendships and relationships with peers and teachers in the school setting. It involves developing skills like self-regulation.
- 3) *Language and Literacy Development* is another critical domain; children need to be able to communicate both by expressing their needs and ideas and by understanding the world around them. Children should have an understanding that letters are associated with sounds (Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, 2005).
- 4) *Approaches to Learning*. Children must be in a safe and developmentally appropriate environment. This allows them to be successful in exploring and learning about their world. Children benefit from enriching, responsive learning experiences (Bruner, 2011). Later academic skills rest on a foundation of early experiences that build happy, healthy, confident children who have developed habits of learning that include confidence, curiosity, and creativity (Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, 2005).

- 5) *Cognitive Development.* Children need to have opportunities to interact with objects and individuals that help them learn how the world works. Cognitive development is promoted through opportunities to interact with novel and stimulating materials such as blocks, toys, water, sand, puzzles, books, and the like (Kamii & Kato, 2005).

To successfully complete the developmental tasks across all of these domains, children need the support of the adults who care for them. It is critical to support Ready Families. This can be done by supporting prenatal care and healthy pregnancy initiatives and by supporting families so that they can care for their babies and build strong attachments vital to development. Families also can be assisted in building skills needed to support their children through home-visiting programs (such as Parents as Teachers or the Nurse Family Partnership), Head Start, Delaware’s state prekindergarten program and child-care subsidy support, and through information and referral services from Help Me Grow. To support the development of Ready Families, there is also a need for Ready Communities. Communities that discourage abuse and neglect, crime, and substance abuse and support education and employment help prepare children for school success by supporting and strengthening families. One of the ways that communities can support Ready Families is through Ready Services with quality programs that are available and affordable. A critical component for ensuring that communities are ready to support children is to make certain that policymakers do not mistakenly view some programs as offering care, while others offer education. It is through caregiving that very young children learn the foundational skills of human interaction, language, motor control, and problem solving (Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, 2005).

To separate early care from early education is to completely disregard two decades of research that clearly establish the primacy of early experiences as influencing all later development. The concept of Ready Schools means that schools need to be ready to work with the diverse population of children that come to their doors with varying backgrounds and experiences (Early Childhood Colorado, 2008). Ready Schools also are equipped to support the way that young children learn best, through hands-on interaction in an environment where teachers address the needs of the whole child—their social, cognitive, and physical needs along with academic curricular content. In this way, kindergarten readiness must be seen as a two-way street. While children need to get ready for success in school, schools need to increase their skills in supporting all children to be successful.

In order to understand how children progress toward building a capacity for school success, it is important to establish a process to measure growth. Assessment systems that begin at birth and track the development of children across all domains of growth and learning help establish this process. An assessment of children’s capacities as they enter kindergarten is just one of the many tools that teachers and schools can use to examine children’s development. For an assessment to have real meaning, it needs to be part of an ongoing developmental measurement process throughout early childhood and be used effectively by educators to individualize instruction and identify the need for extra services. Further, appropriate use of assessment data can lead to effective changes in instruction that best meet the needs of the learner.

What Other States Are Doing

Other states have been active in supporting ready children. In 2008 Colorado developed the Early Childhood Colorado Framework. This is “Colorado’s vision for a system of partners and efforts that will lead to all Colorado children being valued, healthy, and thriving.” This framework addresses the needs of the whole child and family; provides a vision for comprehensive early-childhood work; focuses on measurable outcomes; and guides, organizes, and focuses actions and accountability of all stakeholders (Early Childhood Colorado, 2008). In 2009, *The Framework in Action State Plan* was created to develop the next steps for the early-childhood efforts in the state. The plan was “developed to capture, integrate, and guide efforts and initiatives and promote shared leadership, ownership, and action toward systemic improvements and enhancements across sectors of an early-childhood system (Early Childhood Colorado, 2009).” A component of Colorado’s work is Results Matter, Colorado’s assessment and outcomes program. It is designed to inform policy and practice using ongoing child assessments, family-outcome surveys, and data on program quality. The domains examined—social-emotional, languages, literacy, math, science, creative arts, physical development, and approaches to learning—all map back to the Ready Children framework above. There are plans to link the child outcomes data with the K-12 data system to examine longitudinal results (Colorado Department of Education, 2011).

***Delaware Early Childhood Council Issue Brief* – Kindergarten Readiness: An Overview of the Components**

Maryland has been deeply involved in examining the issue of kindergarten readiness. The Maryland State Department of Education conducts annual school-readiness observations of all children entering kindergarten using the Maryland Model for School Readiness (MMSR) (Maryland State Department of Education, 2011). The MMSR looks at seven Domains of Learning: social and personal development, language and literacy, mathematical thinking, scientific thinking, social studies, the arts, and physical development. The assessment is conducted by trained kindergarten teachers who review work samples, make daily observations, and follow age-appropriate guidelines to assess the skills of each student. As of 2010-11, 81 percent of students enter kindergarten fully prepared, based on the state's criteria—up 32 percent since 2002 (Maryland State Department of Education, 2011).

Another example of a state working toward ensuring that its youngest learners are ready for school is Washington State. Similar to the other state models discussed, stakeholders in Washington believe that ready children, school, parents, families, and communities help children to prepare for kindergarten (State of Washington Department of Early Learning, 2010). The state created a public-private partnership, Thrive by Five Washington, to ensure that families and caregivers have information to support young children in their care.

Delaware

Delaware has been very active in promoting and supporting the development of our youngest learners and supporting initiatives to help advance the readiness effort. The Delaware Early Childhood Council (ECC) is the State Advisory Council on Early Childhood for children from birth to eight years of age and reports to the Interagency Resource Management Committee (IRMC) (Delaware Department of Education, 2011). In 2011, Governor Markell allocated \$22.2M in the state budget for tiered reimbursement and quality programs. This helped Delaware receive a \$50M award from the Early Learning Challenge Grant.

The IRMC is currently supporting an initiative using the Ready Families + Ready Communities + Ready Services + Ready Schools = Children Ready for School framework to collect data from state agencies and develop an early childhood-data map. This is one type of measurement that will help examine the school-readiness skills of children in Delaware. To guide the readiness measurement framework, the IRMC has identified seven essential questions that will guide the ongoing examination of the state's readiness efforts.

The state of Delaware emphasized the importance of kindergarten readiness in its application for the Early Learning Challenge Grant by designating it as the ultimate measure of success. As a result, legislation was passed in June of 2012 requiring the implementation of a common statewide kindergarten readiness assessment to gauge the preparedness of incoming students. The law requires that this readiness tool reach a statewide implementation by 2015. Every child will be evaluated by the child's teacher or member of the school team within 30 days of entering kindergarten. This readiness tool will assess a child's preparedness in five categories: language and literacy development, cognition and general knowledge, approaches toward learning, physical well-being and motor development, and social and emotional development.

Delaware also has a voluntary quality rating and improvement system known as Stars that categorizes early childhood education centers into 5 different levels. Its purpose is to "assess, improve and communicate the level of quality in early care and education and school-age settings." (<http://www.dieec.udel.edu/delaware-stars-participating>) The Stars program aims to increase kindergarten readiness by requiring early childhood education centers to engage in activities that will provide families with the skills and knowledge necessary to help their children successfully transition into kindergarten, and through increasing the overall quality of the centers.

Delaware Readiness Teams (DEL TEAMS) are currently being launched in Delaware. These teams, focusing on at-risk communities, will create an environment in Delaware that will be conducive to a child's successful transition into kindergarten ready to learn and achieve early school success. They will be made up of school and community leaders, early childhood providers, and families.

Delaware Early Childhood Council Issue Brief – Kindergarten Readiness: An Overview of the Components

References

- Bruner, C. (2011). *A project of the Early Childhood Funders' Collaborative supporting state efforts to prepare our children for success*. Retrieved June 26, 2011, from Build Initiative: http://www.buildinitiative.org/files/resources/Bruner_Four_Ovals.pdf
- Colorado Department of Education. (2011, September 8). *Results Matter - The Results Matter System*. Retrieved September 23, 2011, from Colorado Department of Education Home Page: http://www.cde.state.co.us/resultsmatter/download/2011_RM_Information_Brief.pdf
- Colorado Department of Education. (2011, September 15). *The Results Matter System*. Retrieved September 21, 2011, from Colorado Department of Education Home Page: http://www.cde.state.co.us/resultsmatter/rm_system.htm
- Delaware Department of Education. (2011, October 6). *DEDOE Delaware Early Childhood Council*. Retrieved October 6, 2011, from Delaware.gov - The Official Website of the First State: http://www.doe.k12.de.us/infosuites/students_family/earlychildhood/decc.shtml
- Early Childhood Colorado. (2008, July). *Early Childhood Colorado Framework*. Retrieved June 26, 2011, from Early Childhood Colorado - Information Clearinghouse: http://earlychildhoodcolorado.org/inc/uploads/CO_EC_Framework.pdf
- Early Childhood Colorado. (2009). *Framework in Action State Plan 2010-2012*. Retrieved June 26, 2011, from Early Childhood Colorado - Information ClearingHouse: http://earlychildhoodcolorado.org/inc/uploads/ECC_Framework_in_Action_State_Plan_2010-2012.pdf
- Heckman, J. J. (2011, December 16). *Remarks at the White House Early Learning Challenge Announcement*. Retrieved March 7, 2012, from The Heckman Equation: <http://heckmanequation.org/content/resource/remarks-white-house-early-learning-challenge-announcement>
- Kamii, C., & Kato, Y. (2006). Play and mathematics at ages one to ten. In Fromberg, D. P. & D. Bergen (Eds.), *Play from Birth to Twelve*, 2nd ed., pp. 187–198. New York: Taylor and Francis Group.
- Maryland State Department of Education & Ready at Five. (2011). *School Readiness Information*. Retrieved June 26, 2011, from Maryland State Department of Education: http://www.msde.maryland.gov/NR/rdonlyres/BCFF0F0E-33E5-48DA-8F11-28CF333816C2/27804/GettingReady20102011_ExSumm.pdf
- National Association for the Education of Young Children. (n.d.). *Our Mission*. Retrieved September 23, 2011, from NAEYC: <http://www.naeyc.org/about/mission>
- National Association for the Education of Young Children. (2009). *Where we STAND*. Retrieved June 26, 2011, from NAEYC: <http://www.naeyc.org/files/naeyc/file/positions/Readiness.pdf>
- Rhode Island KIDS COUNT. (2005, February). *Getting Ready: National School Indicators Report*. Retrieved June 26, 2011, from Welcome to GettingReady.ORG: <http://www.gettingready.org/matriarch/d.asp?PageID=303&PageName2=pdfhold&p=&PageName=Getting+Ready+%2D+Full+Report%2Epdf>
- State of Washington Department of Early Learning. (2010). *Child Development, Health & Safety - Kindergarten*. Retrieved March 7, 2012, from Department of Early Learning: <http://www.del.wa.gov/development/kindergarten/Default.aspx>